

D.P. Thomson and the Orkney Expedition: a *Tell Scotland* case study

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In much of the English-speaking world after the Second World War those planning Christian outreach emphasized the congregation as the agent of mission.¹ Within this general strategy one tactic came increasingly into favour, that of outreach by visiting. Christians were to be mobilised to share their faith by teams systematically going door to door. Visitation missions differed according to their context, from the local, carried through by congregations in their own area and with their own resources, to those planned and resourced by national or regional agencies. By 1957 it could be claimed that the previous year's venture to Orkney was, if not the largest, at least the most ambitious so far of

¹ This was the central thrust of the "Report of the Commission for the Interpretation of the God's Will in the Present Crisis", otherwise known as the Baillie Commission. Reporting annually to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland between 1941 and 1945, the Commission's findings were published by the SCM Press under the titles *God's Will for our Time* (London, 1942); *The Church Faces the Future* (London, 1943); and *Home, Community and Church* (London, 1944); and finally, edited, as a single book, *God's Will for Church and Nation* (London, 1946); also, M. J. Coalter, "Presbyterian Evangelism, a case of parallel allegiances diverging" in *The Diversity of Discipleship, the Presbyterians and Twentieth-Century Christian Witness*, edd. M. J. Coalter, J. M. Mulder and L. B. Weeks (Louisville, Kentucky, 1991), 41-46; M. A. P. Wood, *Like a Mighty Army* (London, 1955), 25-35; S. Thomson, *Church Standing Tall* (Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand, 2003), 42-47.

such campaigns in Scotland.² This Expedition³ of some 200 volunteers was mounted between July and September 1956 under the leadership of the Church of Scotland Home Board's evangelist, the Rev. D. P. Thomson, and was part of his contribution to the *Tell Scotland* Movement. He published two Orkney-themed pamphlets, *Orkney Through the Centuries*, on church history,⁴ and *From Island to Island!* which tells part of the story of the campaign.⁵ Taking DP's unpublished diaries and other sources also into account, the Orkney Expedition is the best documented of the visitation missions he led between 1947 and 1958. It can therefore serve as a case study for his work, which some of his contemporaries considered as tending to the "perfunctory and superficial".⁶

² "Report of the Home Board" in *The Church of Scotland: Reports to the General Assembly with Legislative Acts 1957* (Edinburgh, 1957), 256: "The three summer months [of 1956] – July, August and September – were given to the most ambitious effort of this kind so far carried through in this country when a team of about two hundred went to the Orkney Islands, including in its ranks more than twenty ministers, who were able to undertake the temporary oversight of several long-vacant parishes as well as the visitation of the homes of the people on twenty-six different islands".

³ The Church of Scotland Council on Mission and Discipleship, The D. P. Thomson Archive: D. P. Thomson, *The Diary of My Life*, part 26, 107: Friday 9 March 1956; and part 27, 79: Friday 2 November 1956 for the title "The Orkney Expedition". The Rev. D. P. Thomson's Diaries were held at the time of this research at the Church of Scotland Offices, 121 George Street, Edinburgh and were made available by the above-named Council, his Literary Executors.

⁴ D. P. Thomson, *Orkney Through the Centuries, Lights and Shadows of the Church's Life in the Northern Isles* (Crieff, 1956).

⁵ D. P. Thomson, *From Island to Island! Experiences and Adventures of the Tell Scotland Summer Campaign Team in Orkney, July to September 1956* (Crieff, 1956).

⁶ *Ecumenical Studies: Evangelism in Scotland* (Geneva, 1954), ed. Secretariat for Evangelism, 33-4; "Scottish Table Talk" in *The British Weekly (Scottish Edition)*, 3 September 1959, 3.

The 1956 Expedition is also usefully illustrative of the *Tell Scotland* Movement.⁷ Begun 1952-53, the Movement brought hope for a revival of church life and incorporated methods of outreach pioneered by, among others, both D. P. Thomson and George F. MacLeod. It enhanced ecumenical cooperation among the national leadership of the denominations and also at the grass-roots of congregational life. Nevertheless as the decade ended *Tell Scotland's* momentum waned. Some blamed Billy Graham's 1955 All-Scotland Crusade for dividing its energies and there was truth in this, but I also argue that the Movement's ideal of congregationally-based mission was frustrated by stasis within Scottish church life. Examination of the Orkney Expedition thus assists the study of general issues: the legacy of the Graham Crusade; the ambivalent attitude of the ministry of the Kirk to the Movement's missionary ideals; the ultimate fading and lost opportunity of *Tell Scotland*.

The Setting: Ministry in Orkney

With its settled farming and seafaring communities, its strong sense of local identity, Orkney might seem ideal as a base for parish ministry. Nevertheless successive models of church administration had difficulty finding both finance and people for ministry on a multitude of islands off the north coast.⁸ In response to a centuries-long weakness of the Established Church, the 19th century saw the rise of Secession congregations so that by 1891 the UP denomination claimed the allegiance of the largest section of Orcadian presbyterians.⁹ The 1929 Union inevitably began a long process of readjustment. By summer 1956 the Church of Scotland had 33 ministries of Word and Sacrament authorised for Orkney, spread out over an archipelago that was home to

⁷ F. D. Bardgett, "The *Tell Scotland* Movement: Failure and Success" in *RSCHS*, vol. 38 (2008), 105-151.

⁸ J. Brand, *A brief description of Orkney, Zetland, Pightland Firth and Caithness* (Edinburgh, 1701 & 1883), 62. See map on p. 228 below.

⁹ C. Brown, *The Social History of Religion in Scotland since 1730* (London, 1987), 60-70.

some 20,000 inhabitants.¹⁰ The Home Board also appointed Lay Missionaries to a number of islands. The communion rolls of the various parish churches totalled some 7,884 members,¹¹ around 40% of the population, besides those belonging to Baptist, Brethren, Congregational, Episcopal, Roman Catholic, Salvation Army and UF-Continuing congregations. Orkney hardly lacked a Christian witness and in the rural parishes of Mainland the Church of Scotland enjoyed a near-complete religious monopoly. While St Magnus Cathedral was the single largest congregation in both Kirkwall and Orkney, the combined membership of the former UP mother church, the Paterson Kirk, and the former Free Kirk, the King Street Church, at 1,146 outweighed the Cathedral's 961. Excluding these three, the average nominal membership roll of Orcadian Church of Scotland congregations was less than 200 – a result both of the multiplication of 'peedie kirks' in the nineteenth century and of the island geography of the county.

How Orkney's rural congregations functioned is dimly recorded in the Church of Scotland's annual *Year-Books* and to an even more limited extent in their Kirk Sessions' minutes. Youth Fellowships were reported at King Street and the Cathedral, at Shapinsay and Westray; Boys' Brigade Companies at the Paterson Kirk and the Cathedral, at Shapinsay and Stromness; North and Stronsay. There were Girl Guides at the Cathedral and South Ronaldsay; St Margaret's, and Scouts at the Cathedral and at Orphir. Apart from these go-ahead parishes, however, organised church life in Orkney centred on the Sunday School and Bible Class, the Woman's Guild and the Choir. A colourful picture is presented in *Almost an Island: Deerness – the story of an Orkney parish*

¹⁰ This figure includes the minister and congregation of Birsay's Original Secession church of Swanneyside which adhered to the Church of Scotland in May 1956 as part of a national union.

¹¹ The Orkney Archives, Kirkwall [OA], OCR 4/29: Presbytery of Orkney Minutes, 154, 13 March 1956: "Annual Report on Persons and Agencies". Other figures in this paragraph derive from *The Church of Scotland Year-Book 1957* publishing data collected in 1955.

published by the Deerness Social History Group.¹² The Sale of Work, the Sunday School picnics; the annual congregational soiree led by the choir; the socials; the annual Flower Service: these were the highlights of the church year in Deerness. Similar organisations and events were normal in parishes across Scotland.¹³ They fitted a routine that included the School Concerts and the meetings of the SWRI, the Young Farmers Club and the Lifeboat Guild, and dances in the Hall. People knew each other well, some taking a lead at this and some at that; but in the case of the church organisations, leadership came from the minister¹⁴ and a few helpers. After Bible Class, unless a YF existed there was no congregational organisation for men apart from the choir and the Kirk Session. Outside of the towns, Orkney's rural congregations had an average of eight elders each,¹⁵ who typically met at the twice-annual administration of communion. Their discussions, such as they were, focused on the admission of new members on the recommendation of

¹² *Almost an Island: Deerness. The story of an Orkney parish*, ed. Deerness Social History Group (Deerness, 2005), 108-128.

¹³ J. McKay, "The Church Social" in *Scottish Life and Society: Religion*, edd. C. MacLean and K. Veitch, (Edinburgh, 2006) as volume 12 of *A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology*, 452-468.

¹⁴ *Almost an Island*, 118-119. Rev. Harald L. Mooney M.A. served as minister of Deerness for 55 years from 1929, when both the Established and Free congregations called him as their minister and to lead them into union. He gave the 1955 AGM of the congregation an account of his activities in the preceding year: "He had conducted 64 services in Deerness, 20 in other churches, 25 meetings of the Bible Class, 20 of the Sunday School and attended 17 Woman's Guild meetings. He had visited 198 houses, done 48 hospital visits and attended 55 meetings in connection with the church".

¹⁵ This calculation is only approximate, being based on figures reported in the *Year-Books* for 1956 and 1957. Evie, Firth, Orphir, Rousay & Egilsay, Shapinsay and Westray reported 13 or 14 elders each.

the minister.¹⁶ It is, perhaps, a mark of a traditional rural community that the qualities of being “inoffensive”¹⁷ and “unostentatious”¹⁸ were high praise.

Although a few of the Church of Scotland’s ministers in Orkney had had connections with the northern isles before accepting their calls,¹⁹ most had recently come from mainland Scotland and would soon return there. Of the twenty-two men in post in July 1956, fifteen had

¹⁶ The Orkney Archives, Kirkwall, hold Orkney’s church records. The following books of minutes have been surveyed: OCR 5/11, Birsay Kirk Session 1946-97; OCR 6 / 2, Burray Kirk Session 1932-58; OCR 7/3, Sanday Cross & Burness Kirk Session 1942-59; OCR 12/18, Harray Kirk Session 1946-96; OCR 14/106, Kirk Session of Kirkwall and St Ola, St Magnus Cathedral 1942-1975; OCR 19/20, Rousay Kirk Session and OCR 19/8, Rousay Congregational Board 1932-63; OCR 21/1, South Ronaldsay St Mary’s Kirk Session 1893-1959; OCR 22/15, Sandwick Kirk Session 1936-67; OCR 24/7, South Ronaldsay and Burray: St Peter’s Kirk Session 1951-59; OCR 26/5, Stromness St Peter’s & Victoria Street 1950-71; OCR 28/8, Flotta & Pharay Kirk Session quoad sacra 1904-81 (under the files for Walls & Flotta Kirk Session); OCR 29/ 6, St John’s & Melsetter Minutes 1933-77; OCR 30/5, Minutes of the Rapness Mission Managers 1930-59; OCR 30/9, Westray Kirk Session 1949-64; OCR/FC/4/4, Birsay Original Session 1948-57; OCR/FC/15/8, The Paterson Kirk, Kirkwall, Kirk Session 1947-59; OCR/FC/16/4, King Street Church, Kirkwall, Kirk Session; OCR/FC/25/2, East United Free Church, Sanday, Kirk Session 1913-59; OCR/FC/36/4, Westray United Free Continuing, Kirk Session 1930-58.

¹⁷ OA, OCR 22/15, Sandwick Kirk Session 1936-67, 176, 25 March 1956, when an obituary was recorded.

¹⁸ OA, OCR 26/5, Stromness St Peter’s & Victoria Street Kirk Session 1950-71, 30, 23 March 1956, when an obituary was recorded.

¹⁹ *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, vols. 1-11, edd. H. Scott *et al.*, (1915-2000) [FES], covers the clergy of the Church of Scotland. *The Fasti of the United Free Church of Scotland 1900-1929*, ed. J. A. Lamb, 2 volumes (Edinburgh, 1956), provides details for the clergy of the Church of that name. DP’s friend Harald Mooney of Deerness, T. G. Tait and the Rev. H. Miles Leith, minister in Firth, were Orkney-born. At St Andrews, the Rev. J. J. Davidson was a Shetlander by birth who had also served as a Home Board Lay Missionary in Shetland (and elsewhere) before retraining for the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

been inducted to their charges during the 1950s and eleven would return south before the end of 1959. Several had come to ordination not via a first degree followed by theological training but after wider experience of life, a number as Lay Missionaries. Four had begun their training for the ministry after various forms of service and employment during the Second World War.²⁰ Nine were in their first charge. Orkney's ministers were men with a broad experience of life who one way or another had been drawn across the Pentland Firth but had not necessarily spent much time in Orkney.

The majority of the presbytery appear to have taken a traditional approach to doctrinal and professional issues that was, perhaps, not untypical of colleagues elsewhere in Scotland.²¹ In 1950 the presbytery disapproved by 17 votes to 5 an Interim Act anent the Baptism of Infants, seeking to delete a condition that parents requesting baptism for their child should themselves be communicant members of the church. In 1951 the presbytery voted not to establish adult Christian education groups but rather "to request ministers to concentrate more on the fundamentals of the Christian faith in their preaching". Of the minority of ministers that were strongly evangelistic, Rev. A. R. Thomson of Kirkwall: King Street was notable. The Monthly United Christian Rally, with its accompanying prayer meeting for revival in Orkney, was held in his Church Halls. In January 1955 the Rev. William Still of

²⁰ The Rev. Edward Fox thus served in the RAF 1942-45 before entering studies at Edinburgh in 1946 aged 33 and in 1950 began a lengthy and fulfilling time as minister of Stronsay. At Holm, John Scroggie had had clerical and administrative work before the war; he entered St Andrews University in 1947, aged 28 and came to Orkney in 1951. Rousay's John Beattie had also been in the RAF 1940-46, and he had served as an RAF Chaplain after ordination in 1951; Firth's Miles Leith was a chemist before his wartime service; he too entered St Andrews in 1946 before ordination to his first charge in 1950, aged 44. Andrew McGill Campbell had served both as a Lay Missionary and as a lay Assistant Chaplain in the wartime RAF before beginning his university course in 1950 (aged 49); he was ordained and inducted to South Ronaldsay: St Margaret's in 1954.

²¹ OA, OCR 4/29, Presbytery of Orkney Minutes 1949-61, 24-25, 42, 43.

Aberdeen: Gilcomston South was the guest speaker.²² When, however, over the winter of 1955-56, the presbytery was asked to welcome the foundation of the Orkney Evangelistic Association it eventually decided to "pass from the matter" by 21 votes to 9.²³

The Origins of the Expedition

Yet evangelism, provided it was "restrained and reverent",²⁴ was still on the agenda in the 1950s. The Orkney Expedition came from the convergence of two separate sets of plans: those of the Church of Scotland presbytery, inspired by the national *Tell Scotland* Movement, and those of the Rev. D. P. Thomson.

Tell Scotland was making its mark in Orkney in 1953-54. In response to an urging of the 1953 General Assembly that "special evangelistic efforts be instituted over next few years", an Evangelism Committee, chaired by an Orcadian, Rev. Harald Mooney of Deerness, was appointed by the presbytery.²⁵ A mission conference was planned for 1954 with visiting lecturers, and two of the initial four *Tell Scotland* pamphlets were circulated to ministers and elders.²⁶ September 1954 saw the Committee enlarged to include three elders and three representatives of the Woman's Guild. Invitations to join went to Kirkwall's Congregational Church ("The Peedie Kirk"), St Olaf's

²² "Church Notices / Monthly United Christian Rally" in *The Orcadian*, Kirkwall, 6 January 1955, 1.

²³ OA, OCR 4/29, Presbytery of Orkney Minutes 1949-61, 149, 13 December 1955 and 151, 10 January 1956.

²⁴ "Kirkwall Minister Meets Billy Graham / Then Answers Our Questions" in *The Orkney Herald*, Kirkwall, 12 April 1955, 1, contained an interview with Rev. A. R. Thomson. Both interviewer and minister clearly valued restraint and reverence in religion.

²⁵ OA, OCR 4/29, Presbytery of Orkney Minutes 1949-61, 76, 14 July 1953; 80, 8 September 1953; and 83, 10 November 1953.

²⁶ OA, OCR 4/29, Presbytery of Orkney Minutes 1949-61, 85, 8 December 1953; also, "The First Four *Tell Scotland* Pamphlets" in *The British Weekly* (Scottish edition), 19 November 1953, 10. Selected for use in Orkney were *An Open Letter to a Layman* by the Rev. Tom Allan and the symposium *Strategy for Mission*.

Episcopal Church and the Salvation Army. November's presbytery agreed there should be a United Act of Witness in Kirkwall in January, and – notably – “that every household in Orkney be visited by representatives of the congregations over the coming months”. Ministers were recommended to hold *Tell Scotland* meetings for elders and office-bearers.²⁷ In all this the Evangelism Committee was leading the presbytery gently along the path mapped out by the national movement. An ecumenical dimension had been accepted and the concept of congregational action with the involvement not just of ministers but of elders, office-bearers and (even) women was gaining attention.

In 1955, again with the national movement, *Tell Scotland* in Orkney supported Billy Graham's All-Scotland Crusade. A Relay Mission via land-line from Glasgow's Kelvin Hall was held in the Paterson Kirk. A rota of parish choirs led praise at the daily meetings between 11 and 16 May.²⁸ Some 50 men and women – in almost equal numbers – were recruited as counsellors and Thomson of King Street was “missioner in charge”. There were some of the same divisions in Orkney about Billy Graham as there were in the south. *The Orcadian* carried an article and subsequent correspondence reflecting complaints about the cost and the “ballyhoo”.²⁹ *The Orkney Herald* asked whether the evangelist relied on mass hypnotism and why an institution by no means dead needed to be

²⁷ OA, OCR 4/29, Presbytery of Orkney Minutes 1949-61, 99, 13 June 1954; 107, 14 September 1965; 111, 9 November 1954 and 116, 14 December 1954.

²⁸ OA, OCR 4/29, Presbytery of Orkney Minutes 1949-61, 119 and 121, 11 January and 8 March 1955.

²⁹ “Drift from the Isles: Freights main cause of the trouble / Unionist Stage Matter of Opinion” in *The Orcadian*, 31 March 1955, 5. The subsequent correspondence: “Letters to the Editor / Billy Graham” also 7 April 1955, 5 and 14 April 1955, 4; “To the Editor”, 21 April 1955, 5; “Letters to the Editor / Billy Graham”, 5 May 1955, 2.

revived?³⁰ For the Crusade's supporters, the Church of Scotland minister in Westray wrote that:³¹

If a considerable section of our church membership, our officebearers, aye our ministers, were to get soundly converted and gained a new vision of their responsibilities to the population of this country, then we would be soundly equipped to *Tell Scotland*.

In the event the meetings were well attended – far better attended than concurrent party political meetings in the run up to the General Election of 25 May, as the *Orcadian*'s opinion column acknowledged, adding "It makes one think".³²

Meanwhile D. P. Thomson had responsibility for training the counsellors for the Crusade in Edinburgh. His existing network of activists, organized in the Work & Witness Movement of which he was Director, was greatly increased over the course of the Crusade. Now came the idea that sparked his post Crusade campaigns.³³

Let us offer to our brethren in the north to take up a team of counsellors and converts during the summer holiday period, that we might share with those who lived so far from the centres of population something of what we ourselves had been experiencing

³⁰ "Book Corner" in *The Orkney Herald*, 5 April 1955, 5, reviewing F. Colquhoun, *Harringay Story: The official record of the Billy Graham Greater London Crusade 1954* (London, 1955); also "Kirkwall Minister meets Billy Graham Then Answers Our Questions" in *The Orkney Herald*, 12 April 1955, 1.

³¹ 'Westray Minister hits out at critics of Evangelist / "Billy Graham is God's Answer to our Need"' in *The Orcadian*, 13 January 1955, 5.

³² "Orcadian Notebook" in *The Orcadian*, 21 April 1955, 4: "... few who heard any of the services remained indifferent. And it must be admitted that it is a most interesting development in the spiritual life of any community in this mid-twentieth century to find that any evangelist, and by his voice alone, is able to fill the Paterson Church for six week nights, and in lovely spring weather too ... it makes one think".

³³ D. P. Thomson, *The Sutherland Adventure: the Tell Scotland Campaign in the Presbytery of Tongue, August 9th to 29th, 1955* (Crieff, 1955), 1-4.

and discovering. I was sitting by my fireside at home when that happy inspiration came.

The serendipity of this fireside meditation was that it offered a solution to two problems: on the one hand, an earlier request for action in Sutherland; on the other, DP's desire to keep together the fellowship the Crusade had generated by finding new areas in which to deploy his people. In August 1955 the "Sutherland Adventure" therefore went ahead as the *Tell Scotland* campaign in the Presbytery of Tongue. This in turn generated campaigns in the Presbytery of Mull and around Ullapool early in 1956, and the vision (fantasy?) of a "*Tell Scotland* fleet sailing for Orkney and Shetland".³⁴

D. P. Thomson presented these campaigns as the solution to a problem.³⁵

... the man-power situation in what have been described as the "fringe areas", in the Northern and Western Highlands and in the island groups off the Scottish Coast. There, parishes tend to be large; vacancies many, and ministerial resources less than in any other part of the country.

Thomson argued at the September 1955 *Tell Scotland* Steering Panel that, though their principles suggested that "each area, if not actually each parish, should provide the necessary personnel for the carrying through of a visitation campaign within its own bounds", his Tongue campaign demonstrated "that there were areas in which the local forces, however well organised or trained, were quite inadequate to the task, and where the necessary ministerial leadership would not be available on the spot". As *Tell Scotland* wished to promote missions across the nation from autumn 1955: well, in these "inadequate" areas, his teams

³⁴ Thomson, *The Diary of My Life*, part 25, 132: Saturday 10 September 1955.

³⁵ D. P. Thomson, *West Highland Adventure: The Tell Scotland Campaign in Mull and Iona, Coll and Tiree, Morvern and Ardnammurchan* (Crieff, 1956), article "*Tell Scotland*" on the inside of the front cover.

would supply the need. DP knew that some in *Tell Scotland*'s leadership criticised his style of regional evangelism as evading the principle of local responsibility³⁶ – even now the Steering Panel's support for this initiative was less clear-cut than he presented it³⁷ – but if the Movement could embrace Billy Graham,³⁸ then it certainly included D. P. Thomson, from whose post-war visitation campaigns it in part originated.

Orkney, though, hardly fitted DP's concept of "large parishes" and "few ministers". The Church of Scotland alone, adding Lay Missionaries to ordained ministers, provided roughly one preacher for 500 people. As to vacancies, the presbytery were concerned that eleven

³⁶ Thomson, *The Diary of My Life*, part 24, 58-59: "Friday 26 November 1954, 8.55 a.m. ...Yesterday ... In the afternoon I attended the TELL SCOTLAND COMMITTEE MEETING at 2.30 at 121 George Street. It was a perturbing meeting. Smellie said there had been a long and anxious discussion about my Training Schools in the Steering Panel – doubt being expressed about two questions: the use of people outside our own area and the question of whether they were making that a way out of their local responsibilities".

³⁷ New College, Edinburgh, Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World [CSCNWW], uncatalogued papers deposited by Scottish Churches House / Action of Churches Together in Scotland: Tell Scotland box, Minutes of Meeting of Tell Scotland Steering Panel held on Tuesday 13th September 1955. The sense of this minute was that the Panel heard and noted the report but maintained reservations. They did not require to approve the plans.

³⁸ Thomson, "Tell Scotland" in *The Sutherland Adventure*: "The Tell Scotland Movement is a united effort in which all the major Protestant denominations are working together on a long-term plan designed to carry the Church to the people – where they live, where they work and where they spend their leisure-time. It aims at the fullest possible utilisation of the lay forces of the Church, and is not confined to any one method of evangelism or any one type of approach. Originating in the Visitation Campaigns carried through in the immediate post-war period, it naturally stresses the value of this particular medium, but its use of the American evangelist, Dr Billy Graham, and his Team is clear evidence of its readiness to adopt other and widely different forms of contact and appeal. The constituency it is out to reach is the whole manhood and womanhood of the nation".

charges (one in three) were vacant in November 1955.³⁹ By early 1956, however, all but one of the ten ministerial vacancies in the presbytery were for island charges.⁴⁰ Orkney's smaller islands certainly had difficulty attracting and retaining ministers in the 1950s, and to this extent the perception of "several long vacant parishes" was justified. Six of the presbytery's 33 parishes might be so described: North Ronaldsay, Papa Westray, Eday, Flotta & Fara, Hoy & Graemsay, South Ronaldsay: St Mary's.⁴¹ Lay Missionaries were based in Papa Westray, Eday and Graemsay, however; and North Ronaldsay had the benefit of the Rev. Dr. J. K. Cameron as locum for the summer of 1956.⁴² Orkney's vacant charges may not all have had ministers of their own, but they were not wholly bereft of Christian ministry. DP's motivation was rather less about with the situation in Orkney and more to do with offering opportunities for his people.

Following his meeting with the Steering Panel, D. P. Thomson began to put flesh on his vision for 1956. He wrote to the Presbytery of Orkney to offer a campaign, a letter received at the January meeting and

³⁹ "11 out of 32 Orkney Kirks have no minister" in *The Orkney Herald*, 22 November 1955, 5.

⁴⁰ In the north both the smaller islands of North Ronaldsay and Papa Westray were vacant: North Ronaldsay since 1947 and Papay since 1953. Westray itself fell vacant in December 1955, as did Shapinsay. Rev. E. G. Chirgwin, minister of Sanday: Cross & Burness and West since 1950 had been inducted to the Paterson Kirk in Kirkwall in August 1955 and had yet to be replaced in Sanday. Eday had had no minister since 1949. Within Seapa Flow, Flotta & Fara had been served by Home Board missionaries 1929-37 and then by ministers 1937-1948. The parish was vacant 1948 to June 1953 when the Rev Charles Fraser was inducted; but he then accepted a new call to the Orkney Mainland charge of Evie in March 1955, leaving Flotta & Fara again vacant. Hoy & Graemsay had been vacant since 1950 as had St Mary's Kirk, South Ronaldsay. Details from *FES*.

⁴¹ See map on p. 228 below. Apart from South Ronaldsay, these were small islands with equally small populations, yet still in 1956 self-standing parishes.

⁴² Thomson, *From Island to Island!*, 31. This was before Cameron took up his appointment to St Andrews University Church History Department.

remitted to the Evangelism Committee.⁴³ Next, DP visited Kirkwall between 6 and 9 March. Greeted at the quayside by Thomson of King Street, he met with Harald Mooney and then with the whole Evangelism Committee, obtaining its agreement to a three month campaign.⁴⁴ Later that month, however, when the Committee sought the presbytery's authority for DP's plan, it met with resistance. In discussion three motions were proposed. The first option to be dismissed was that the "report of the Committee be not received" – a procedural device for killing the project. Two further options remained: either that the mission might work in those parishes where the ministers and kirk sessions invited support, or else that it might come only to those parishes where there were no existing ministers or missionaries, in effect excluding the mission from Mainland. Finally a majority voted to allow DP access wherever he could secure an invitation. The Rev. E. G. Chirgwin, newly inducted minister of the Paterson Kirk, dissented from this decision, and Revs. D. Sutherland of Sanday: East and J. M. Rose of the Cathedral adhered to his dissent.⁴⁵

The Orkney Expedition was thus initiated and planned by D.P. Thomson. *The Orkney Herald* reported the presbytery's decision under the headlines: "Summer Crusade in Orkney Parishes"; "Over 250 evangelists expected" and commented:⁴⁶ "The sober terms of this motion give only the merest hint of the actuality – a mission which will be conducted on a grand scale". The essential concept for this "Crusade" was not the visitation of Orkney by its own congregations that had been mooted, but a visitation by teams of volunteers recruited from the south under DP's leadership. The campaign had the support of the local *Tell Scotland* committee but not the wholehearted support of the presbytery. The invitation to the campaign had been opposed by, among others, the ministers of the two largest and most influential

⁴³ OA, OCR 4/29, Presbytery of Orkney Minutes 1949-61, 152, 10 January 1956.

⁴⁴ Thomson, *The Diary of My Life*, part 26, 106-107.

⁴⁵ OA, OCR 4/29, Presbytery of Orkney Minutes 1949-61, 155, 13 March 1956.

⁴⁶ "Summer Crusade in Orkney Parishes / Over 250 evangelists expected", *The Orkney Herald*, 20 March 1956, 1.

congregations in the islands: those of the Paterson Kirk and St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall.

Preparations and Invitations

During May 1956 D. P. Thomson returned to Orkney to make further plans for the summer, securing the invitations he had been authorised to seek. From his base in the Deerness manse he drove to Stromness:⁴⁷

We drove on to Stromness, where we saw Hector Ross Ross was one of the leaders of the opposition to the campaign in the presbytery and proved difficult. He thinks there ought to be no more campaigns of any kind for 20 years! He finally gave full permission for Flotta, of which he is Interim Moderator, but was quite distinctly against anything being done in Stromness.

Rev. Hector G. Ross had come to Stromness: North in 1954 from his first charge, the Priesthill Church Extension, to which he was ordained in October 1949 with the task of planting a congregation in a new, expanding housing scheme. Numerous ministers after the Second World War began their vocation in such Church Extension charges, often with the assistance of George F. MacLeod and the Iona Community. Indeed, as DP left the islands in September 1956, George arrived, to speak as Leader of the Community at the Cathedral and at the North Church, Stromness.⁴⁸ Ross's hostility to campaigns was very likely influenced to George MacLeod's public opposition to *Tell Scotland's* invitation to Billy Graham. Though he did not reject DP's offer of preaching and pastoral cover for Flotta, one of Orkney's long-standing vacancies, Ross's prohibition on "anything being done in Stromness" excluded the

⁴⁷ D. P. Thomson, *The Diary of My Life*, part 27, 3 and 4, Thursday 17 May 1956 9.45am and Sat. 19 May 1956 11.45am.

⁴⁸ "Iona Community Leader for Orkney", *The Orcadian*, Thursday 6 September, 5.

forthcoming Expedition from Orkney's second town.⁴⁹ DP's tour finished with a visit to the presbytery clerk who, presumably conscious of the unease of some of his colleagues, was "neither wholly for nor against".⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the clerk, David Williams, minister of Stenness, gave permission for an open-air service within his parish at the heart of Orkney, the Ring of Brodgar. By Thursday 17 May Thomson was able to release his plans to the press. The *Orcadian* reported him as saying:⁵¹

Already sufficient Orkney parishes had expressed a desire for a campaign in their midst to ensure that the three months will be fully occupied. Islands which have already sent invitations are Westray, Papa Westray, Eday, Shapinsay, Rousay, Egilsay & Wyre in the North Isles, and South Ronaldsay, Burray, Flotta, Hoy and Walls in the South. Congregations in many parts of the Mainland have also asked to be visited. In terms of population – we have been asked to cover considerably more than half of Orkney.

Much was made in the publicity for the campaign of the requirement that only those parishes that invited the team would receive attention.

⁴⁹ Stromness St Peter's & Victoria Street was then vacant with Rev. Victor Pogue as their temporary Interim Moderator. Aware that Stromness: North Church was not participating, the Session decided to ask D. P. Thomson to meet with them – he in fact invited them to a joint meeting with other elders that took place on 10 July after the beginning of the campaign and no decision was ever minuted. OA, OCR 26/5, Stromness St Peter's and Victoria Street Kirk Session, 1950-71, 1 June 1956, 31, under their Interim Moderator, Rev. V. Pogue; Thomson, *The Diary of my Life*, part 27, 31: Tuesday 10 July 1956. On Sunday 8 July DP "addressed a united meeting of the elders of 4 parishes – Orphir, Firth, Stromness: Victoria Street, Stenness".

⁵⁰ D. P. Thomson, *The Diary of My Life*, part 27, 4: "Saturday 19 May 1956 9.45am: ... We then went to Stenness & saw Williams the Presbytery Clerk, neither wholly for nor against. He agreed to a Conventicle in August at the Standing Stones".

⁵¹ "Rev. D. P. Thomson maps out his campaign" in *The Orcadian*, 31 May 1956, 3.

The point was essential to the formal approval of the presbytery.⁵² Examination of kirk sessions records, however, reveals several sets of minutes that simply do not mention the campaign at all, even though teams visited during the summer: Burray; Harray; South Ronaldsay St Mary's; South Ronaldsay St Peter's; Walls: St John's & Melsetter. Of the fifteen minute books available in the Orkney Archives, only four confirm that the elders of the congregation explicitly agreed to issue an invitation: these were the Sessions of Birsay, Rousay, Sanday: East and Kirkwall: King Street.⁵³ At Sandwick, a minute notes that the issue was discussed at the close of a Communion Thanksgiving Service, where informal agreement may possibly have been given.⁵⁴ The Westray Kirk Session expressed interest and asked for details, but no details were ever minuted apart from the Interim Moderator's announcement that the mission's leaders would undertake pulpit supply during the vacancy and the annual holiday of the Lay Missionary at Rapness.⁵⁵ The first recorded mention of the mission at Flotta was while the team were on

⁵² "Summer Crusade in Orkney Parishes / Over 250 evangelists expected" in *The Orkney Herald*, 20 March 1956: 1: "The Presbytery and Mr. Thomson himself have made it very clear that this is no mission imposed from without. The team have waited for the Presbytery and their visits to individual parishes will be by direct invitation of the minister and Kirk Session. Without such an invitation no visit will be made. It lies with individual congregations to decide whether a visit from the team will heighten their religious life, and help to focus the direct evangelistic appeal of the *Tell Scotland* movement in their midst".

⁵³ OA, OCR 5/11, Birsay Kirk Session 1946-1997, 63, 26 June 56, meeting under their Interim Moderator, Rev. J.F. Gillan; OCR/FC/16/4, King Street, Kirkwall, 124, 22 May 1956, under their minister, Rev. A. R. Thomson; OCR 19/20 Rousay Kirk Session, 5 April 1956, under their minister, Rev. D. Beattie; OCR/FC/25/2, East United Free Church, Sanday, Kirk Session 1913-1959 as Church of Scotland, Sanday East, 30 March 1956, 20 and 27 May 1956, under their minister the Rev. D. Sutherland.

⁵⁴ OA, OCR 22/15, Sandwick Kirk Session 1936-1967, 2 June 1956 under their minister, Rev. J. F. Gillan.

⁵⁵ OA, OCR 30/9, Westray Kirk Session 1949-64, 130, 23 March 1956; and 135, 5 June 1956 under their Interim Moderator, Rev. E. P. G. Fox.

the island and their leader, a visiting minister, constituted the Session.⁵⁶ It is, on this evidence, difficult to see that the kirk sessions, and much less the congregations, had actually given whole-hearted consent: rather, it was their ministers or Interim Moderators who issued the actual invitations. DP did, however, later meet with a number of Sessions to discuss detailed arrangements.⁵⁷

The Kirkwall: King Street minutes explain why the campaign they had approved did not go ahead in Kirkwall. Lacking the support of both the Cathedral and the Paterson Kirk, DP cancelled visiting within Orkney's capital.⁵⁸ The Revs. Chirgwin⁵⁹ and Rose⁶⁰ – inducted in August and September 1955 respectively – never presented their kirk sessions with the issue of inviting the mission: no invitations were forthcoming. Cooperation was confined to the occasional use of their church buildings for public worship and rallies, to the use of their halls for accommodation and, in both ministers' cases, to their personal

⁵⁶ OA, OCR 28/8, Walls & Flotta Kirk Session Minutes, Flotta and Pharay quoad sacra 1904-1981, 13 July 1956, under the missioner, the Rev. John Barclay. DP however, had called in advance of sending his team across, meeting the Session Clerk and making arrangements for accommodation.

⁵⁷ Thomson, *The Diary of My Life*, part 27, 24: Thursday 21 June 1956 – a meeting with the three elders of the Kirk Session of Papa Westray and three members of the Women's Guild; *ibid.*, 31: Tuesday 10 July 1956 "... a united meeting with the elders of 4 parishes – Orphir, Firth, Stenness, St Peter's & Victoria Street, Stromness"; *ibid.*, 33: Saturday 14 July 1956: "with 19 elders and Women's Guild representatives of the 3 churches [on Sanday]".

⁵⁸ OA, OCR/FC/16/4, King Street, Kirkwall, 125-26, 24 June 1956: "Tell Scotland / The Moderator reported that Rev. D.P. Thomson had met the ministers of Kirkwall but so far King Street was the only church that had invited the Tell Scotland mission to operate within its area. He had decided in the meantime to cancel the mission in Kirkwall in favour of public meetings".

⁵⁹ OA, OCR/FC/15/8, Paterson Church Kirkwall Minutes 1947-59, 2 February 1956 to 5 August 1956.

⁶⁰ OA, OCR 14/106, Minute Book of the Kirk Session of Kirkwall and St Ola, St Magnus Cathedral, 24 April 1942- 23 August 1975, entry 20 June 1956, under their minister the Rev. J. M. Rose.

participation in some of the events of the summer. This, of course, did not prevent any who wished from attending the mission's rallies, prayer meetings, Bible studies and training events held in Kirkwall.⁶¹

Tell Scotland as a movement officially believed in the importance of the laity; indeed, it spoke in elevated terms of "the apostolate" of the laity.⁶² In the origins of the 1956 campaign in Orkney, however, very little effort – on either side – was made to involve anyone beyond ministers in the key decisions. In May 1956 the press asked DP how members of Orcadian congregations might assist the mission. He replied that they might "take an interest" and pray; they might contribute money to assist the finances and, certainly, "by personal participation": he had it in mind that perhaps some folk from Mainland might join the teams to go to the smaller islands.⁶³ The campaign was clearly conducted under the banner of the national *Tell Scotland* Movement but even among its supporters its proclaimed principles had little impact on the minister-dominated decision-making of the Church of Scotland. Given the top-down nature of the planning underpinning this campaign, it is perhaps surprising that there was as much Orcadian involvement as there proved to be. Elsewhere in Scotland, country parishes were often resistant to *Tell Scotland's* call to lay mission and initiative.⁶⁴ In 1952 Thomson had reported that "he had discovered

⁶¹ "Tell Scotland Team Sails for the South Isles" in *The Orkney Herald*, 10 July 1956, 1: "Interest in the capital is obviously growing and quite a number of local people have availed themselves of the opportunity of joining the team at Bible study".

⁶² "Report of the Home Board" in *Reports to the General Assembly with the Legislative Acts 1954* (Edinburgh, 1954), 220.

⁶³ "Plans for Orkney Evangelistic Campaign / Tell Scotland Team will have Kirkwall G.H.Q." in *The Orkney Herald*, 22 May 1956, 5.

⁶⁴ Bardgett, "Tell Scotland: failure and success", 134-136; "New Horizons for Country Parishes" in *Life & Work* June 1956, 147; "An Open Letter To Country Laymen / A city layman writes" in *ibid.*, August 1956, 219; "Country Readers Speak Their Mind / Replies To City Layman" in *ibid.*, October 1956, 255-56; "Country Readers: It isn't all like that / The Other Side Of The Story" in *ibid.*, November 1956, 282.

more deep-seated opposition in Strathmore to the whole idea of such a campaign than he had ever done in any other part of the country".⁶⁵

Orkney, July-September 1956

Orkney 1956 was thought ambitious both because of the logistics required by the archipelago and because of the number of volunteers from the south who took part. DP's 200-250 supporters, however, were not all present at once: they came for a week or two weeks of summer holiday at a time, though some students offered longer. Ministers from the south also gave a week or two of their summer to offer pulpit supply on one of the vacant island charges. DP was pleased that he was able to recruit Christians from the world church for the Expedition: a Chinese graduate Jimmy Hui;⁶⁶ Rev. Etian Onuk from Nigeria; Rev. Sinoia N'Kowane from Malawi; Miss Margaret Simpson, Sister Tutor at Vellore Hospital, India. As the leader of the campaign, Thomson spent much time collecting and dispatching his volunteers, travelling to the various islands to arrange temporary accommodation or to visit established teams. He found opportunities to preach every Sunday, moving from Westray to Kirkwall's King Street, to Hoy and Graemsay, to Walls Old, back to Kirkwall, out to Shapinsay. He was supported by his wife Mary and by a younger full-time colleague, the Rev. Matthew N. Patterson, a former Baptist minister in the process of being accepted into the Church of Scotland.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ "Strathmore Campaign" in The Church of Scotland, Minutes of the Home Board 10298-10955: May 1952-April 1953, Home Board 17 December 1952, 4969, from the Minute of the Evangelism Committee of date 5th November 1952.

⁶⁶ G. Gibson, "Northern (Side)lights" in *Life & Work* September 1956, 227: "The most cheerful person I met in Orkney, young Chinese graduate, Jimmy Hui, who brightened many a home with his cheerful good humour and tremendous Christian conviction".

⁶⁷ "The Rev. D. P. Thomson" in The Church of Scotland, Minutes of the Home Board 12311-13010: June 1955-April 1956, Home Board 22 February 1956, 12771, from the Minute of the Evangelism Committee of date 1st February 1956. Paterson was temporarily employed by the Home Board in 1956 to support DP's summer campaigns.

The Expedition proved to be a kaleidoscope: within one general pattern, each element had its distinctive features. The vacant charge of Flotta & Fara had for an initial two weeks a resident team of a dozen present led by a Seaside Missions enthusiast, the Rev. John Barclay from Airdrie; then for the rest of the summer a smaller delegation crossed Scapa Flow each weekend to lead worship. North Ronaldsay was sent only two of the younger men, who stayed for a fortnight between steamers. Papa Westray, Eday, Shapinsay and Rousay were visited for two weeks each by distinct teams under separate leaders: respectively Matthew Patterson, Rev. David C. Wilkie (a former overseas missionary), Rev. John Macintyre (Edinburgh: Rosehall) and Rev. William Eadie (Airdrie: High). In Westray the campaign undertook pulpit supply for the Church of Scotland during July and August and three successive leaders gave two weeks each to the lengthy campaign there: Rev. John E. Brown (Kirkcaldy: St Brycedale), Rev. Richard Ross (an Irish Presbyterian from Ballymena) and a Baptist layman, Mr James Cossar from Charlotte Chapel, Edinburgh.⁶⁸ Visiting teams were based in vacant manses or borrowed schools; they looked after their own catering and shared in the "ordered common life", "the common discipline of prayer, fellowship and service" that made being part of one of DP's teams such a profound experience.⁶⁹ One observer,

⁶⁸ Thomson, *From Island to Island!* 15-17.

⁶⁹ D. P. Thomson, pamphlet *The New Evangelism [II] Incarnational Evangelism*, (probably Glasgow, c.1950); rebound in *Aids to Evangelism* (Crieff, 1956) and incorporated, adapted, as "The Way of the Incarnation" in *Aspects of Evangelism* (Crieff, 1968), 28-36; Thomson, *From Island to Island!* 25: "What I learned from the Team was the tremendous value and enrichment and strength that there is in Christian fellowship. There were anything up to twelve of us staying at St Margaret's Hope – men, women, and youth of very different ages, from very different backgrounds, from very different denominations (Methodists, Episcopalian, Baptist, Church of Scotland, and Church of Nigeria), from many different towns and different countries. What held them together was their common love of God. They were all one in Christ Jesus. We didn't give a thought to the things that were supposed to divide us; we gave much thought to the things that united us".

Glen Gibson, *Life & Work*'s assistant editor, wrote of:⁷⁰ "the mainspring of the campaign and the source of their unity and inspiration – Bible study and prayer and a willingness to accept the discipline of the work".

Whether on islands or, later in the summer, based in Mainland, the teams followed the same daily routine. Bible study was a feature of the mornings, and a welcome to this was extended generally to whoever was free to join the team. On Papa Westray several did attend, and DP records an incident when one local, being missing, was chased up at home and found, ill in bed, reading the day's passage in *Philippians*.⁷¹ Afternoons and evenings were for visiting: "Everywhere, the aims of the team would be to carry the ministry of the church to the fireside".⁷² D.P. Thomson wrote much about the practice of visiting in which he was training his teams: the essential aim was to help visitors and visitees to speak openly about their faith.⁷³ Talking "about the things which really matter" could be a powerful experience, especially for the naturally taciturn.⁷⁴ An added ingredient in Orkney was the expectation that "Family worship will take place in each home to be visited by the team".⁷⁵ The visitors appear to have been welcomed, so that those with

⁷⁰ G. Gibson, 'Northern (Side)lights' in *Life & Work*, September 1956, 227.

⁷¹ Thomson, *From Island to Island!*, 12. The Bible-study material had been prepared by DP and was published as: D. P. Thomson, *Epistle to the Philippians. A four week question course for "Tell Scotland" training schools and campaigns and for preachers, teachers, Bible students and Bible study groups* (Crieff, 1956).

⁷² "Plans for Orkney Evangelistic Campaign / Tell Scotland Team will have Kirkwall G.H.Q." in *The Orkney Herald*, 22 May 1956, 5.

⁷³ Thomson, *Aspects of Evangelism*, 133-134; *We saw the church in action! The Press and BBC report on those visitation campaigns 1947 to 1954*, ed. D. P. Thomson (Crieff, 1954); D. P. Thomson, *Guidance For Those Engaged In House-To-House Visitation Campaigns* (Crieff, 1955); *Two by two! The rank and file of the church report on what happened when they went out visiting*, ed. D. P. Thomson, (Crieff, 1955); *You are going out visiting? Let us tell you a little about it! By (1) Elders of the kirk, (2) Women of the guild, (3) The young people*, ed. D. P. Thomson (Crieff, 1955).

⁷⁴ Thomson, *From Island to Island!*, 27.

⁷⁵ "Rev. D. P. Thomson maps out his campaign" in *The Orcadian*, 31 May 1956, 3.

prior experience were surprised by the warmth of their reception.⁷⁶ One of the Shapinsay team had her reflections published in *From Island to Island!*⁷⁷ They had had a friendly and hospitable welcome, she reported, but the visitors left pondering as to the islanders' real thoughts. Such visiting – even conducting 'family worship' – did not necessarily lead to sharing at a deep level. Sometimes it was the visitor who was the learner: "I don't know if we passed on much of our knowledge and faith in Jesus Christ, but I do know that the folks in Shapinsay taught me a lot".

Around this pattern of teams living in fellowship and visiting households, D. P. Thomson built a further structure that offered opportunities for witness, prayer and preaching. His volunteers might be asked to speak at the regular Services of Witness. Often held on a Sunday evening, these involved team members speaking about their experience of "Christ and His Church". DP often called on women to give their witness:⁷⁸ "At the evening service I put on five of the girls to speak and all did well". *Tell Scotland* sought to train the laity "for the task of witness" and DP's Voice of the Pew services gave a platform, rare in the Church of Scotland, for the non-ordained.

Once the Kirk's Seaside Missions Organiser, DP took such opportunities for open air speaking⁷⁹ as Orkney's summer events offered. While visiting the team at Hoy in July, for example, he attended the Parish Cup football match between Lyness and Harray on the Saturday evening, "at which I spoke at halftime".⁸⁰ Teams also attended

⁷⁶ Thomson, *From Island to Island!*, 3 (Flotta); 7 (Fara); 12 (Papa Westray); 14 (Shapinsay); Westray (16); 24 (South Ronaldsay); 27 (Burray); 28 (Pentland Skerries).

⁷⁷ Thomson, *From Island to Island!*, 15.

⁷⁸ Thomson, *The Diary of my Life*, part 27, 38: Sunday 5 August 1956.

⁷⁹ D.P. Thomson, *The Church in the Open Air* (Crieff, 1965), from the introduction "The Evangelist in the Open Air", inside front cover. "I am convinced that there is still a place for the Church under that open canopy of heaven, beneath which the Master Himself first proclaimed the message of life ... where the sun is shining and the winds are blowing, and where men can still be reached with the Gospel".

⁸⁰ Thomson, *The Diary of my Life*, part 27, 33, Monday 16 July, 1956; 10.10am Campaign HQ, Walls & St Johns, Melsetter, Hoy.

the East Mainland, Dounby and County Agricultural Shows with a stand, bookstall and speaking platform. Open-air rallies were held while the campaign operated in Orkney Mainland from the beginning of August. Special services were held at places of interest, at which DP spoke, taking incidents from Orcadian church history to illustrate his appeal. On Sunday 19th August, at the Covenanters' Memorial in Deerness, he spoke from *Hebrews* 12.1-12 – “so great a cloud of witnesses” – and of the witness of the Covenanters, “perhaps narrow-minded ... but ... they had convictions to live and if need be to die for”.⁸¹ A similar rally was held at the prehistoric Ring of Brodgar⁸² and two in September, one at the remains of the Norse chapel on the Brough of Birsay and one at the Orphir Round Church.⁸³ At this last DP directed his sermon directly to church members: Had they fulfilled the vows they had taken? Of marriage? Of membership or as officebearers? These “conventicles” were in the long tradition of open air evangelism, historically themed because DP believed that it was important to identify with local culture. 50 years later, an Orcadian correctly remembered the text on which DP spoke at the Ring of Brodgar: *Joshua* 4,6.

Occasional church services thus punctuated the campaign, and these included a number of International Services at which the overseas team members spoke; the Welcome and Valedictory services that began and ended sections of the campaign; the midweek Report Meetings in Kirkwall during which prayer news was shared. Publicity was also important to DP and he took care to see that the press reported his plans and his sermons, his personal visiting of the sole islander on Gairsay.⁸⁴

⁸¹ “Conventicle at Deerness / Tell Scotland Open Air Gathering” in *The Orcadian*, 23 August 1956, 4.

⁸² “Tell Scotland Campaign / Open Air Service at Ring of Brodgar” in *The Orcadian*, 30 August 1956, 5.

⁸³ “Tell Scotland Campaign / Open Air Service for Birsay Brough” in *The Orcadian*, 6 September 1956, 5; “Tell Scotland Campaign / Open Air Service at Brough of Birsay” in *The Orcadian*, 13 September 1956, 3; “250 People Attend Last Open Air Service” in *The Orcadian*, 20 September 1956, 3.

⁸⁴ G. Gibson, “Northern (Side)lights” in *Life & Work* September 1956, 227.

and his letters of thanks as the teams finally left. Because Thomson realised that crusades, rallies and special services on the whole only attracted church people,⁸⁵ his strategy was by the impact of the open air events, by his pamphlet *Orkney through the Centuries*, by the central rallies and by overall campaign publicity to get a wider group of people talking and thinking and receptive: "How to bring religion from the circumference of men's lives to the centre – how to make it the one burning topic of conversation wherever people gather, and to push sex, sport, politics and money into the background for the time being!"⁸⁶ His mature theology deriving from the Scottish tradition of Liberal Evangelicism,⁸⁷ D. P. Thomson had come to prefer not to push for "decisions". He believed that issuing a reiterated appeal, Billy Graham-style, for an immediate public response was spiritually unnecessary and potential harmful.⁸⁸ Yet at the Brough of Birsay, "where mighty Thorfinn reigned", he proclaimed the transforming power of God: "No

⁸⁵ D.P. Thomson, *Dr Billy Graham and the pattern of modern evangelism* (Crieff, 1966), 9-11, in which DP argued that large rallies largely reached "insiders" and were not the most effective method for "reaching the man right outside the church".

⁸⁶ Thomson, *Aspects of Evangelism*, 142-144.

⁸⁷ R. A. Riesen, *Professor A. C. Cheyne: an Appreciation* (Edinburgh, 2006), 63-65 offers a brief introduction to Liberal Evangelicism. DP acknowledged an intellectual and personal debt to Rev. Prof. W. M. Clow, Principal of the United Free Divinity College at Glasgow, his Professor of Christian Ethics and of Practical Training for the Ministry, of whom he wrote that he was: "one to whom men learned to look back with a growing sense of indebtedness the longer they were in the ministry": D. P. Thomson, *David Inglis Cowan: Man and Minister* (Crieff, 1961), 43. An intellectual debt was also acknowledged to Prof. Henry Sloane Coffin of Union Seminary and Bedford Park Presbyterian Church, New York, on whom: B. J. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy, Fundamentalists, Modernists and Moderates* (New York/Oxford, 1991), 87-95, 223, 227; Thomson, *The Diary of My Life*, part 18, 122-3: "Tuesday 19 December 1950, ... how great a debt I owe to Coffin for the content and form of my message. It would seem to me now, looking back, that he confirmed and intensified and greatly developed my approach along the lines it had already begun to take".

⁸⁸ Thomson, *Dr Billy Graham and the pattern of modern evangelism*, 14-19.

man was too old – none too young for God to make a new man of him that day!”⁸⁹

Nevertheless it was the visiting that was at the heart of the mission. In August and September the teams moved on to Burray and South Ronaldsay, the West Mainland parishes of Firth, Rendall, Evie, Stenness, Orphir, Birsay, Harray and Sandwick, and the East Mainland parishes of Deerness, Holm and St Andrews.⁹⁰

How far were Orcadians themselves were involved in all this? Clearly much was undertaken by the visiting volunteers. Some room, however, was made for local church members to share in the mission beyond prayer, Bible study, hospitality and attendance at rallies. On one island, Stronsay, it was not DP’s teams but the local Kirk Session that undertook the visiting for *Tell Scotland*, supported by an International Evening with Jimmy Hui and the Rev. Etian Onuk, and rallies with DP himself at the very end of September.⁹¹ Though DP got on well with Stronsay’s Rev. E.P.G. Fox on a personal level, he disapproved of his policy of conducting visitation locally and wrote so, in *From Island to Island!*:⁹² “One lesson Orkney underlined that the mainland of Scotland had already burned into us – there are in every parish people who will only open their hearts to a stranger”. In Westray, though, the pairs of folk that went out to households across the island were made up of a team and a local church member. Burray was visited by Orcadians from Kirkwall under the leadership of the 1955 Relay missionary, A. R. Thomson from King Street who, certainly, had a vision for lay

⁸⁹ “Service at Brough of Birsay / Where Mighty Thorfinn Reigned”. *The Orkney Herald*, 11 September 1956, 1. DP was preaching from *Acts* 26, 18-19 and of men in the past who like Paul and Earl Thorfinn “were not disobedient to the heavenly vision” and were transformed in character and ambitions.

⁹⁰ Thomson, *The Diary of my Life*, part 27, 47, Monday 20 August 1956.

⁹¹ Thomson, *The Diary of my Life*, part 27, 66: “On the St Ola on my way home.”

⁹² Thomson, *From Island to Island!*, 29.

participation.⁹³ The locals gathered for prayer in the Cathedral Halls and then motored down across the Churchill Barriers to pair off with team members coming up from their South Ronaldsay base. *From Island to Island!* contains a recollection from this experience:⁹⁴ “It made me realise as never before the great need for personal evangelism in our islands”. A request for information in 2006 found fifteen folk still living

⁹³ “Orkney will hear Billy Graham” in *The Orkney Herald*, 8 February 1955, 1: as missionary for the relay mission, Rev. A. R. Thomson was interviewed by the *Herald* and was reported as saying: “*Tell Scotland* is meant to be not merely a campaign or a passing phase in the Church’s life, but something which is to stay and be continuous. Certainly there are campaigns within the Movement such as those conducted by the Rev. D. P. Thomson, the Church of Scotland Home Mission Evangelist, and the All-Scotland Crusade to be conducted by Rev. Dr Billy Graham this spring, but *Tell Scotland* lays the emphasis on the work of local congregations. However missions do give us inspiration and initiative. Missions often break up the hard crust which forms on the spiritual life of a community, and so facilitate the efforts in evangelism made by the local congregation”.

⁹⁴ Thomson, *From Island to Island!*, 27. “I, an Orcadian privileged to go out with members of the *Tell Scotland* Team’, writes one of those who shared in the work and fellowship at Burray, ‘will ever remember with gratitude to God the opportunity afforded me of speaking with fellow-Orcadians concerning the things which finally matter – I was blessed beyond all expectation through fellowship with and inspiration gained from various members of the Team. I shall always remember our gathering prior to going out on evening visitation – the asking of God’s blessing on the work committed to us, and then the prayer offered on each doorstep ere entering the house asking for and knowing of God’s presence and help in a wonderful way. But – above all – the outstanding point for me was the sense of deep gratitude shown by many people for the reading of God’s Word and the prayers offered around their firesides. Truly this opened my eyes to the deep longing in the hearts of so many people around us for the things which really matter. It made me realise as never before the great need for personal evangelism in our islands. We thank God for sending the *Tell Scotland* people to Orkney”.

in Kirkwall who had gone out visiting with the teams in 1956: they, too, remembered having been paired with visitors from the south.⁹⁵

The Results of the Orkney Expedition

By the end of September 1956 D. P. Thomson was very tired. An element of disappointment is evident in his diaries, though the tone remained generally positive. The Open-Air services, his own key contribution to the public face of the mission and each attended by 200-250 people, he believed had been “uniformly successful”, “Nothing at all startling, but very worthwhile”. On the other hand he wrote “Disappointing” of the final Valedictory at the Paterson Kirk.⁹⁶ The emotions of an exhausted man are no reliable guide, however, to assessing a mission: DP himself always insisted that it was long-term results that should be expected.⁹⁷ What, therefore, were the results of the Orkney Expedition?

Aspects of this mission illustrate why some of his contemporaries considered DP’s campaigns “perfunctory and superficial”.⁹⁸ The first week in August saw the numbers of volunteers peak at 56; the last week of September and of the campaign found a team numbering 15. “I had not thought that we would be anything like as strong at the finish”, DP

⁹⁵ In preparation for a presentation I gave in Kirkwall in May 2006 of research towards this paper at the invitation of the Presbytery of Orkney, an elder of Kirkwall: East, Mr H. Shearer, kindly enquired among colleagues in Kirkwall about recollections of events in 1956. I was able to gather further reminiscences while in Orkney at that time, some followed up by phone and email.

⁹⁶ Thomson, *The Diary of my Life*, part 27, 66: 9am. “On the St Ola on my way home”.

⁹⁷ “Rev. D. P. Thomson maps out his campaign” in *The Orcadian*, 31 May 1956, 3: “Mr Thomson said that the really important results would be the long term results. These were the results that were continually justifying the work of the *Tell Scotland* movement”.

⁹⁸ “Scottish Table Talk” in *The British Weekly (Scottish Edition)*, vol. 143, 3 September 1959, 3.

wrote. September's visiting programme in Mainland was handled by under-strength teams and was barely completed:⁹⁹

The Northern Area visitation – the West Mainland – finishes today. Harray, Evie, Rendall, Sandwick, Birsay – all pretty well done. The East Mainland is finished except for a small section of St Andrews. Stenness is about half through and Firth not begun. ... We will do a Blitzkrieg on Friday and Saturday – intimations only.

Moreover the impact of the mission, the sense of "buzz" that DP sought to create, must have been diluted by Orkney's geography: events on Westray were of little significance to Kirkwall, and vice versa. Where the teams had a chance to get to know people and to be known by them, on the smaller islands – Flotta, Papa Westray, Graemsay – and on Westray, where the campaign had strong support from the Baptist, Brethren and UF congregations – that was where most impact was perceived.

"How is the mission going?" was a question that the regular Report Meetings encouraged supporters to ask. The first public stock-taking was published in *The Orcadian*, 13 September 1956: an article by one of the campaigners, Timothy Barclay, an Edinburgh social worker. He set out the questions he had heard asked about the mission:¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Thomson, *The Diary of my Life*, part 27, 41: Sunday 5 August 1956; *ibid*: 62, Wednesday 26 September 1956.

¹⁰⁰ "With D. P. Thomson in Orkney ... a tornado breezed in! By Timothy Barclay (an Edinburgh Social Worker working with the *Tell Scotland* Team)", *The Orcadian*, 13 September 1956, 3. See also a parallel article by Barclay: "The Orkney Campaign in Perspective by Timothy Barclay of Edinburgh" in *The Orkney Herald*, 25 September 1956, 4: "Despite what any critics may say to the contrary the *Tell Scotland* Campaign has on the whole been welcomed by the vast majority of Orkney folk. To say that the Rev. D. P. Thomson and his team should never have conducted a campaign in these islands at all is to deny the right of the Holy Spirit to operate in any person by any means God may ordain. To say that the campaign is to be quickly dismissed as being of no consequence because one or two team members did not come up to the mark in personal conduct is to close the door on God using the most inadequate of us in His service".

Have D.P. [and his campaigners] really achieved what they set out to attain, or have they been preaching and talking to people whose church connection is already strong? Has their message been relevant to the local situation, or has it been some vague pie in the sky philosophy which has no real bearing on the irksome duties of everyday living? A third question Orcadians are asking is: 'Why are the team here at all?'

More significant than Barclay's answers to these questions is his testimony to the fact that they were being asked. Local sentiment wondered whether the arrival of a mission from the south was some sort of criticism: whether the immense effort was unnecessary because the islands already had a strong church connection. As to opposition on more philosophical grounds, there was, certainly, a part of Orcadian society who, "nurtured on Mrs Margaret Knight, Bertrand Russell or Bernard Shaw",¹⁰¹ believed in "Morals without Religion"¹⁰² or else in deism without clergy.¹⁰³

Set against the numbers of church members living in Mainland, the numbers of those attending the campaign's rallies and open-air services were not remarkable. By contrast the Orkney Sunday Schools Union's annual service at the Paterson Kirk had gathered 900 young people earlier in 1956, and the 1955 relay mission rather more than 1,000 per

¹⁰¹ "Read all about it / The Voice" in *The Orkney Herald*, 5 April 1955, 4.

¹⁰² Margaret Knight, *Morals without Religion and Other Essays* (London, 1955), which contained talks entitled "Morals without Religion" first given on the BBC Home Service in January 1955.

¹⁰³ Leslie I. Rendall, "Investigation into the Unknown no. 7 / Did I Speak with the Dead?" in *The Orcadian*, 27 September 1956, 7, was the last of seven feature articles on spiritualism, "the psychie seience", run by *The Orcadian* during the *Tell Scotland* campaign. An Orcadian, Rendall denied that he was trying to disrupt the campaign but attacked the historical reliability of the Bible and affirmed "We are all ehildren of one Supreme Being. A God who awaits to be expressed in love through us. A God who actually requires no Church, no elergyemen and no holy books – unless suelh will assist us to be of service to Him by serving our fellow man".

night for 6 successive nights.¹⁰⁴ The Church of Scotland claimed over 2,000 members in Kirkwall between its three congregations and against these totals the 300 at the final Valedictory Service at the Paterson Kirk was not impressive. DP chose not to recall the story of the Mainland campaign in *From Island to Island!* Improved attendances at Sunday worship on Flotta; well-supported worship on Graemsay and Papa Westray, the small central hall on Westray full to overflowing – in terms of numbers at mission events, these were the highlights he reported from the summer of 1956.¹⁰⁵

After some visiting campaigns conducted in this period very substantial numbers could be added or returned to the church/es concerned. Though no dramatic results were claimed of the campaign in Orkney, *From Island to Island!* reported individual conversions, particularly in Westray.¹⁰⁶ Examination of the annual congregational statistics collated by the presbytery¹⁰⁷ shows that there were more new professions of faith during 1956 than in any other year of that decade: a 28% increase on the annual average for the rest of the period. As the numbers of those removed from the rolls by death or departure continued to exceed the new arrivals, however, total Church of Scotland membership in the presbytery continued its slow decline, roughly in proportion to the fall in the overall population of the county, a drop of

¹⁰⁴ “900 Children Fill Kirkwall Church” in *The Orcadian*, 3 May 1956, 3; and “7,000 heard Billy Graham in Orkney” in *The Orcadian*, 21 April 1955, 5.

¹⁰⁵ Thomson, *From Island to Island!*, 4-5, 11, 12, 15-17.

¹⁰⁶ Thomson, *From Island to Island!*, 16. “Twice ... the Team came back at night and told us of three accepting Christ as Lord and Saviour, which was a great joy to us all”.

¹⁰⁷ OA, OCR 4/29, Presbytery of Orkney Minutes 1949-61, annual reports of Persons and Agencies, as minuted pages 26, 47, 66, 89, 124, 154, 189, 220, 247, 275. The inconsistencies between year ends in the original figures is mirrored in the table at Appendix 1, p. 227 below.

over 10%.¹⁰⁸ The nominal strength of the church in Orkney also restricted reported growth. On North Ronaldsay, for example, the entire population (bar two) appears to have been claimed as members of the kirk. There were particular congregations that were increasing in these years, among them Kirkwall: King Street and Stromness: North, the congregations whose ministers were the strongest supporter and the most determined opponent of the Orkney Expedition.¹⁰⁹ As one Orcadian observer commented, however, in relation to the Billy Graham Relay Mission, counting church membership is one thing – discovering “a considerable increase in generosity, tolerance and compassion, wherever we go in Orkney ... gladness shining out everywhere ... happier, more abundant lives” is something else, less accessible to history.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ The UK Census for 1951 and 1961 gives the population of the County of Orkney as 21,173 in 1951 and 18,747 in 1961.

¹⁰⁹ Harray; Kirkwall: King Street; Kirkwall: The Paterson Kirk; Kirkwall: St Magnus; St Andrews; Stromness: North and Stromness: St Peter's. The *Church of Scotland Year Books* for 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959 and 1960 printed the statistics supplied by ministers for the years 1954, 1955, 1956, 1957 and 1958 respectively; but several parishes' entries were missing from 1957 and the editor reprinted the figures for 1956.

¹¹⁰ “Island Diary / Transformation” in *The Orkney Herald*, 3 May 1955, 4: “Figures given out by Orkney presbytery show a further decline in church membership in the past year. The figure may or may not be significant; a church member is not necessarily a Christian or a good man; and the decrease in membership does not necessarily mean an increase in wickedness in the islands ... The big tide of Billy Graham has flowed and ebbed again. Has it scattered any marvellous jetsom on our shores? It is too early to say yet. But if the campaign was successful, in the next twelve months or so we should expect to notice a considerable increase in generosity, tolerance and compassion, wherever we go in Orkney. We should notice that the crude improvised masks of sin and time have been torn from scores of faces and gladness shining out everywhere. We hope that people will live happier, more abundant lives as result of Billy Graham's preaching. But we expect to see unmistakable signs of it in the individual and communal lives of the Orkney people”.

The Orkney Expedition had little impact in relation to *Tell Scotland*'s major goal: to enable the church to achieve a self-sustaining cycle of growth. 1956 saw a higher than usual number of professions of faith, after which the statistics reverted to their pre-mission levels. Beyond visitation evangelism, *Tell Scotland* encouraged congregations to set up their own Bible study / action groups whose joint study and prayer would issue in missionary action.¹¹¹ At the national *Tell Scotland* Conference in Edinburgh in October 1956,¹¹² Tom Allan argued that the Movement's development could be threatened if it was too closely identified with "rudimentary kinds of visitation. Sometimes one single house-to-house campaign can be more dangerous than none at all". Nothing in the reports of 1956 suggests that such congregational groups were formed in Orkney as a result of the Expedition. The response of the presbytery set the tone. In November 1956, Harald Mooney presented the report of the Evangelism Committee, which emphasized as especially deserving thanks the ministers who had offered pulpit supply for vacant charges.¹¹³ The conclusion of the campaign was followed by the dissolution of the Evangelism Committee. Most of Orkney's ministers had supported or permitted the work of DP's teams in their parishes; once the mission was concluded, however, the campaign was over and its support-structure was removed without a vote.

Though the presbytery played its part in burying *Tell Scotland* in Orkney, the response of its churches in Kirkwall was also significant. As Kirkwall had not been visited over the summer, towards the end of 1956 the three Church of Scotland kirk sessions returned to the original

¹¹¹ R. Falconer, *Message, Media, Mission: the Baird Lectures 1975* (Edinburgh, 1977), 134. Looking back over the years of *Tell Scotland* as a whole, one of its originators, BBC Scotland's the Rev. Ronald Falconer, saw such study as the heart of the movement.

¹¹² "Sent Out / Over 1,000 Church Members report and prepare" in *Life & Work*, December 1956, 307-08.

¹¹³ OA, OCR 4/29, Presbytery of Orkney Minutes 1949-61, 13 November 1956, 180.

agenda: that “every household in Orkney be visited by representatives of the congregations over the coming months”.¹¹⁴ All three Sessions were asked to discuss separately the possibility of a visitation of the burgh, their conclusions to be later submitted to a joint meeting.¹¹⁵ On 1 October the King Street elders duly considered the proposal and suggested that each Session first visit its own congregation, then distribute joint publicity for Christmas services and finally invite DP and a team back to lead a Kirkwall visitation at Easter.¹¹⁶ King Street’s delegates took their ideas forward to the central meeting,¹¹⁷ which, however, was only able to conclude that no joint evangelistic action at all was desired but that each Session should continue with its own pastoral responsibilities. Not even joint Christmas leaflets were acceptable.¹¹⁸ *If* a visitation of Orkney by its own congregations had ever been a possibility, the summer of 1956 did nothing to further it.

“What, it may well be asked, do campaigns of this kind achieve?” D.P. Thomson’s section of the Report of the Home Board to the 1957 General Assembly asked, rhetorically, this question and proceeded to offer several answers.¹¹⁹ DP’s primary answer was that, even if there had been no response in Orkney (and this was not the case): “[The campaigns] have a profound and far-reaching effect on the lives of individual members of the teams”. He was concerned with training the laity to witness for Christ and – thinking only of the teams – this result could be demonstrated. *From*

¹¹⁴ OA, OCR 4/29, Presbytery of Orkney Minutes 1949-61, 10 November 1953, 83.

¹¹⁵ OA, OCR/FC/16/4: King Street Church, Kirkwall, Kirk Session. 127, 25 Sept. 56.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 130-31.

¹¹⁸ OA, OCR 14/106: Kirk Session of Kirkwall and St Ola, St Magnus Cathedral 1942-1975, 10/10/56; OA, OCR/FC/15/8: The Paterson Kirk, Kirkwall, Kirk Session 1947-59, 15 October 1956.

¹¹⁹ “Report of the Home Board” in *The Church of Scotland: Reports to the General Assembly with Legislative Acts 1957* (Edinburgh, 1957), 257. The same question was asked and much the same answers given by Glen Gibson, *Life & Work*’s assistant editor; G. Gibson, “*Tell Scotland visits the friendly Isles / Orkney welcome to 400 Campaigners*”, in *Life & Work* October 1956, 225-6.

Island to Island! is very largely an account based on the recollections of the volunteers and emphasizes their positive responses to their time in the north. In DP's diaries for the summer of 1956, the most personal entry concerns the baptism at St Magnus by DP himself and Mr Rose of a sixteen year old volunteer, a young man from Morrison's Academy, Crieff, brought up by agnostic parents, who as a result of his month in Orkney was reported in *Life & Work* as having decided:¹²⁰

I feel Christ calling me, and I am ready. I will become a member of the Church when I return home.

When Home Board reports spoke of the work of D.P. Thomson with the laity, what was in mind was this training by doing, this learning in service, fellowship and community that he had developed since 1947. Because Thomson realized the gulf between ordinary congregational life and the potential of his activists, he organized campaigns as opportunities for them to talk and learn, share and serve.¹²¹

As far as DP was concerned, he simply pressed on with his agenda for the autumn. He had turned 60 on 17 May 1956 and was now very tired "but I have survived and life still lies ahead". He had to prepare for the yet more ambitious 1957 Shetland Campaign. Perhaps, in the end, he was not too impressed by the results of his summer in Orkney. He chose to conclude *From Island to Island!* with a question, arising from a comment "All very friendly!" made by one of the two team members sent to North Ronaldsay:¹²²

¹²⁰ Thomson, *The Diary of my Life*, part 27, 45, Tuesday 14 August 1956, 9pm St Magnus Cathedral Halls, Kirkwall, recounting the Baptismal Service at St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall at 8.30pm on Sunday 12 August 1956; Gibson, "Tell Scotland visits the friendly Isles" in *Life & Work*, October 1956, 226.

¹²¹ Thomson, *The Sutherland Adventure*, 3.

¹²² Thomson, *From Island to Island!*, 32.

“All very friendly!” I find myself lingering over that significant diary entry. Did it get any further? Was this difficult venture justified? That is something which only the Great Day will declare!

A decade later, in 1966, DP was to make public an inference he drew from looking back over his entire ministry:¹²³ “Broadly speaking, the fruits of a mission are in inverse ratio to the scale on which operations are conducted – they follow in the spiritual realm the economic ‘law of diminishing returns’”. In 1966 he believed that this “law” had been true of the 1955 All-Scotland Crusade. Perhaps he came to think the same judgment also applied, in measure, to his Orkney Expedition, for which “Never in the long history of the Church of Scotland had so many travelled so far to attempt so much in so short a time!”¹²⁴

One limitation to D. P. Thomson’s ministry was that he did not engage – he was not allowed to engage – more than minimally with the structures of the Kirk. Influential he certainly was – Peter Gordon, one of those with him in Orkney in 1956 was to describe him as one of the two greatest men in the Church of Scotland (George MacLeod was the other)¹²⁵ – but it was as a practitioner, not a policy-maker.¹²⁶ DP’s focus was on the personal, encouraging individuals in their walk with Christ:

¹²³ Thomson, *Dr Billy Graham and the pattern of modern evangelism*, 36 and 33.

¹²⁴ D. P. Thomson as reported in “Closing Stages of the *Tell Scotland Campaign*” in *The Orkney Herald*, 25 September 1956, 2.

¹²⁵ Thomson, *The Diary of My Life*, part 27, 123-24: “Wednesday 23 January 1957, 12.35 p.m. I ... returned to Christ’s College where I addressed the students on Visitation Evangelism. Peter Gordon presided. He amused me afterwards by saying that he regarded George MacLeod and myself as the two greatest men in the Church of Scotland! But it is good that he, who is joining the Community, should want to come with us to Douglas at Easter”.

¹²⁶ Thomson, *The Diary of My Life*, part 25, 109-110: “Saturday 23 July 1955, 9:45 a.m. ... I feel that I must come to a decision about the future this autumn. I don’t think I particularly want me and Tom, Smellie and Horace are teaming well there. Mackintosh will soon be retiring and as I am feeling the strain of the work and have no say in the shaping of policy it might be best that I should go. If I am to write and to make use of all material I have accumulated I will have to resign now!”

the results achieved by the Orkney Expedition were personal. In 1957, on seeing the subsequent spiritual progress of the young teamer baptised at St Magnus, DP wrote:¹²⁷ "The Orkney Campaign would have been worthwhile for [him] alone." Several – perhaps many – examples of people can still be found, Orcadians and team members, whose faith was strengthened and whose lives were changed. People who joined the Church in 1956 were elders in Orkney 50 years later.

How typical was the Orkney Expedition of D. P. Thomson's work in the 1950s? This question could take us far from the centre of this paper but, briefly, the Expedition was one of a group, planned immediately after the All-Scotland Crusade, that were more dependent on external teams than others of his campaigns. The *Tell Scotland* missions in the Presbyteries of Tongue, Mull, Orkney and the area of Rossshire around Loch Broom, 1955-56, all originated in his desire to continue the follow-up of the Crusade with counsellors and converts. Similarly his immediate post-War campaigns, of which Kintyre and Glasgow: North Kelvinside were most notable, had sought to expand opportunities for those involved with Seaside Missions. Once DP had moved on from being Seaside Missions Organiser to his post as Home Board Evangelist, however, his 1950-1955 campaigns – Paisley, West Fife, Kirkcaldy, Strathmore, Inverness, Nairn, Caithness and in areas of Edinburgh – were intended to mobilise local volunteers. How far they did is another story. The final campaigns of 1957 and 1958 – Douglasdale, St David's Knightswood, Shetland, the Central Glasgow Churches Campaign and the Galloway Training Schools – saw renewed attention to involving local Christians. Orkney was near one end of the spectrum of local involvement: St David's Knightswood, a 1958 campaign to a population of 12,000, was at the other, being almost wholly staffed by local personnel.

¹²⁷ Thomson, *The Diary of My Life*, part 28, 51: Saturday 26 October 1957.

The Fading of *Tell Scotland*

D. P. Thomson spoke to the Home Board's Evangelism Committee in February 1957 about his work in 1955 and 1956, enthusing about the "wonderful response from the laity" to the campaigns he had led. At the same meeting the Rev. Ian MacTaggart, Field Organiser for the *Tell Scotland* Movement, reported on "the lack of a dedicated lay leadership" that was a drawback to his work.¹²⁸ Both evangelists were asked to explain this apparent contradiction, and MacTaggart's paper has survived in the *Tell Scotland* archive. He argued that there was no "real dichotomy".¹²⁹

It seems to me that we are viewing the same subject from two different angles. Mr Thomson is concerned with the spearhead of missionary enterprise in Scotland, and, quite rightly in my opinion, he indicates that there is a solid core of lay men and women who are prepared to work for and pray for the Church's mission in our day. On the other hand I was trying to view objectively *the proportionate response* to the missionary imperative by numerous congregations with which I have had dealings within the past eighteen months. To change the metaphor, the vanguard is battling manfully, but the vast body of the troops are neither engaged nor do they (most of them) hope to be engaged. My simple contention is that the bulk of the Christian forces are not *effectively* used for Christ's cause in the world.

Not that MacTaggart denied that most elders did useful work within their congregations: supporting the administration, maintaining the

¹²⁸ "Reports from Evangelists" in The Church of Scotland, Minutes of the Home Board 13011-13638, May 1956-April 1957, 6383-4; Home Board 20 March 1957, 13,418 and 13,419, from the Minute of the Evangelism Committee of date 20 February 1957.

¹²⁹ CSCNWW, Tell Scotland box, I. MacTaggart, "Reflections on Lay Initiative in the Church" in file: Department of Mission, minutes 1-10 and Papers re Tell Scotland leading to Dept. of Mission 1959-67.

buildings, running the organisations, even visiting districts. His conclusion, however, was that "This kind of leadership is totally inadequate if the Gospel is going to make a dent on the secular world. The world is not going to be saved by better sermons and busier church halls". On the one hand, the ministry persisted in performing as unconnected one-man bands; on the other, too many of the laity were spiritually illiterate. Missionary stasis resulted. Unlike some, MacTaggart was prepared to welcome the longer-term, diffused impact of DP's "vanguard" on the Kirk.¹³⁰ Visitation evangelism, he suggested, could be a useful first step towards lay initiative. Yet, perhaps more reflective than D. P. Thomson (who inclined to a pragmatic¹³¹ catholicism¹³²), he also posed three questions needing new answers "if we are to see a resurgence of missionary dynamic in the Scottish Church and the emergence of lay initiative at a new level": "What is the function of the Church?", "What is the task of the Congregation?" and "What is the function of the Ministry?"

The 1956 Orkney Expedition thus demonstrates, in miniature, difficulties faced by *Tell Scotland* on the national scale, unrelated to the All-Scotland Crusade. The majority of elders in Kirkwall, Orkney's commercial, professional and administrative centre, opposed enthusiastic outreach in their town. Orkney's evangelistically-minded ministers, however, having had their campaign with D. P. Thomson, had had their *Tell Scotland*. The Expedition was initiated by DP, agreed to by the local ministers with minimal involvement from their office-bearers and

¹³⁰ MacTaggart, "Reflections on Lay Initiative in the Church": "The first steps in lay initiative have sometimes emerged out of the experience of Visitation Campaigning. There is a tendency in place to 'play this down', but it cannot be doubted that, at this level, many Church people have begun to raise their sights".

¹³¹ I. Doyle, "Introductory Memoir: D. P." in D. P. Thomson, *Women of the Scottish Church* (posthumously published, 1975), 11: "This pragmatic approach was very typical of DP".

¹³² D. P. Thomson, *Personal Encounters* (Crieff, 1967), 127: "I am convinced that we have to understand one another better, and that, as far as our convictions will allow, we must be ready to pray and to work with one another".

little understanding by the congregations of the concepts propagated at a national level. Afterwards the local *Tell Scotland* committee was disbanded. Conventional congregational life continued as before. Certainly the debates about the 1955 Crusade may well have encouraged some in their opposition to such special campaigns, though DP had met similar resistance at (for example) Brechin,¹³³ Alyth¹³⁴ and Rattray¹³⁵ in 1953. Reticence, doctrinal uncertainty or ignorance, a sense of inadequacy in spiritual matters combined with, perhaps, a status-informed sense of the appropriate, were obstacles to DP's style of

¹³³ Thomson, *The Diary of My Life*, part 20, 189: "Friday 26 March 1953 ... Yesterday ... to Forfar and Brechin where I had a Brechin Ministers' Meeting in the Cathedral Manse. Quite inconclusive. Anderson [*Rev. James Anderson of Brechin: Cathedral*] was for a campaign on our lines – McNaughtan [*Rev. Arthur McNaughtan of Brechin: West & St Columba's*] against. The Fraternal will decide but I am not hopeful". The Strathmore Campaign never did reach Brechin.

¹³⁴ NAS, CH2/912/1, Alyth: High Kirk Session Minutes 1876-1967, 466, 25 January 1953.

¹³⁵ Thomson, *The Diary of My Life*, part 20, 151: Monday 23 February 1953 and *ibid.*, 164-65: Tuesday 10 March 1953: "I got news this morning that Traill's Kirk Session had voted against the Campaign by 5 to 4 after all we have done to meet their wishes. That means no Blairgowrie Campaign! No Alyth and no Blairgowrie and Ardler, Bendochy and Meigle contracting out just stultifies all we are attempting to in this area and makes Meigle and Newtyle's original invitation incomprehensible. It also makes it a very open question whether I am justified in going on beyond October for which Forfar is planned. In 35 years working in Scotland I have never met the obstructions I am encountering here".

campaigning.¹³⁶ Not so many were prepared to commit themselves “beyond the conventional requirements of a Christian” ... “to a public avowal of your Christianity”.¹³⁷ More broadly, however, in Orkney in 1956 “the fundamental *Tell Scotland* principle, which declares that the congregation must be the agent of Christ’s mission in the area in which it finds itself”¹³⁸ was deliberately sidestepped as all concerned colluded to leave mission largely in the hands of the incoming teams. *Tell Scotland*’s principles ran counter to the established expectations of ministers and congregations. Their implications were not fully pursued even by those who operated under the banner of the Movement. At its outset the leaders of *Tell Scotland* intended to challenge complacency¹³⁹ and clericalism¹⁴⁰ in the kirk: a failure to rise to that challenge,

¹³⁶ *You are going out visiting?*, 2-4: “[*An elder*] ... probably you feel that this is not the sort of work for you; you think that visitation should be left to those who find talking easy on matters of religion or who are accustomed to dealing with strangers, or who have had long experience of active church work and know all the answers. [A Women’s Guild member] When the Campaign started in our town I was most reluctant to help in the house-to-house visiting. I felt that to intrude upon strangers in their homes was an invasion of their privacy which they might justifiably resent. I was quite wrong! [*An elder*] On the first doorstep I looked at my partner and said ‘What will we say to these people?’ At no time before in my 50 odd years of life had I felt so helpless and inadequate for a task”.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³⁸ C. Craig, “An answer to an unanswered question” in *The British Weekly (Scottish edition)* 14 June 1956, 10.

¹³⁹ The initial press launch of the Movement had challenged the “conventional life of the Church”. CSCNWW, *Tell Scotland* box, *Tell Scotland Minutes 1952-1962*, Notes of the Steering Panel, 9 September 1953, 1-2: “The urgency of the Church’s missionary task is being brought home to us in several ways: (i) We are recognising the inadequacy of traditional methods of evangelism. (ii) We are conscious of the apparent failure of the conventional life of the Church to respond in compassion to the needs of the world”.

¹⁴⁰ NLS, acc. 9084.347, MacLeod of Fuinary and Iona Community, folder “Glasgow Churches’ Campaign”: paper marked “1950, Cricff” for George F. MacLeod’s opinions on limits to mission c.1950; also, T. Allan, *The Face of My Parish* (Edinburgh, 1984), 98-117; Bardgett, ‘*Tell Scotland* – failure and success’, 150.

observable in Orkney and widespread elsewhere, goes a long way to explain the fading of the Movement.¹⁴¹

Boat of Garten

¹⁴¹ Between 1993 and 1997 the author was Community Minister for the Church of Scotland Presbytery of Orkney, which in 2006 sponsored the lecture that began his exploration of this theme. Financial support for research towards a new biography of the Rev. D. P. Thomson M.A., D.D. (forthcoming as *Scotland's Evangelist*) is gratefully acknowledged from both the Church of Scotland Council on Mission and Discipleship and the Strathmartine Trust.

Appendix 1

By end of	total	+ professions	+ cert./	+ rest./	total	By end of
1949	8393	201	152	53	8339	1950
50	8200	156	153	10	8169	51
51	8308	164	123	8	8198	52
52	8198	159	126	14	8120	53
53	8120	155	167	8	7992	54
54	7992	170	117	8	7884	55
55	7976	205	152	16	7830	56
56	7830	127	104	17	7676	57
57	7676	162	102	10	7591	58
1958	7581	143	121	37	7535	1959
Average excl. 1956		159	129	18		



The Islands of Orkney

